

*Below: Text from a letter from the senior faculty of Columbia's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences to John H. Coatsworth, interim provost of the university.*

Provost Coatsworth:

We, as senior SEAS faculty, wish to inform you and President Bollinger that the current crisis of leadership in our school has reached a stage where it is severely impacting our ability to achieve fundamental goals. The morale of the faculty and their trust in Dean Peña-Mora are reaching an all--time low. The only way to avoid irreparable damage - including loss of key faculty and complete alienation of those who remain - is to effect a quick change in leadership.

The problems we are facing are not new and all previous attempts by the faculty to resolve them or even to have input into their resolution have not succeeded. The problems we are dealing with have been festering for two years. We have seen evidence of these problems ourselves almost daily and they have seriously impacted our work.

In recruiting and promotion decisions we have seen a critical mismatch between the Dean's academic values and our own: candidates with impressive academic records and outstanding recommendations are discounted if their fields do not promise major funding for the school. Metrics for evaluation are focused upon financial measures rather than academic quality.

We have also suffered from a managerial style which produces arbitrary responses to perceived problems without thought or consultation with those who will be affected. A case in point is the Dean's decision to change the entire structure of the SEAS teaching assistant system because one department had abused it

- and this well into the term - causing chaos for faculty, PhD students and all those enrolled in our classes.

More chaos resulted last spring when outside consultants were hired to reclaim 25% of the school's space for other purposes. Not only did these consultants fail to consult with faculty about how the space was being used, but there were numerous errors of plain fact in their reports.

The Dean's mandated increase in the size of the Master's programs has been a further source of difficulty for both faculty and students. Doubling class sizes when there are not classrooms to hold them and people are sitting on the floor or in the halls just to increase the school's revenues may provide quick cash - but it ultimately hurts our reputation among future Master's students and undergraduates alike - our future alumni.

Finally, the most serious hindrance to real communication and collaboration between faculty and dean is a now deeply rooted lack of trust. The Dean has repeatedly disavowed written as well as oral agreements made with individuals and departments. Not surprisingly, when one side routinely breaks agreements, the other side despairs of any future fruitful collaboration.

We sympathize with the current concern that an immediate public change in leadership might adversely impact the school's chances of winning the NYC competition for a new applied sciences campus.

However, the fact that a number of us who have invested time and effort in creating Columbia's proposal are signing this letter should tell you how serious the current situation is. To avoid any negative impact, the announcement of the leadership change can simply be deferred until the outcome of the competition has been determined in December.

However, the leadership situation needs a clear resolution now. We understand that there is a proposal to appoint a Senior Vice Dean to handle some of the Dean's duties. We see this as only a temporary measure a step in the transition to a new leadership in the Dean's Office. We would ask that the duties of this new position be clarified and that the appointment of a new Dean be made in a timely manner.

The loss of confidence in Dean Peña-Mora is overwhelming. With each additional day faculty unhappiness is growing. We are convinced that prolonging the tenure of the current Dean is damaging the school, its reputation, and its ability to retain its top faculty -- especially if New York City should choose an outside university such as Stanford or Cornell to establish a new engineering school in the city.

Yours Truly.

The SEAS Faculty